

Education key to economic growth, actor Wayne Rogers tells business leaders

Published: Wednesday, Oct. 12, 2011 2:21 p.m. MDT

SALT LAKE CITY — Wayne Rogers is a man known for taking chances and succeeding.

He was one of the original cast members of the landmark television show "M*A*S*H" when he decided to leave the show to pursue other interests.

After departing, he became involved in numerous business ventures, including investment strategy, electronics and banking. In addition, he has continued his acting career and has become a producer. Today, he is well-respected businessman, author and entrepreneur as well as a contributor to the Fox News network.

Speaking Wednesday to an audience of 550 people at the Grand America Hotel in downtown Salt Lake City, Rogers said his experience in artistic endeavors and passion for learning helped lead him to success in business.

"Entrepreneurs bring to business ... creativity," he said. "If you are an entrepreneur, you have to think outside of the box."

Rogers was the featured speaker at the Economic Development Corporation of Utah's annual meeting. He said he has been "cursed with an inquisitive mind."

"I have an appetite to always learn," he added.

Rogers said that passion for knowledge and interest in business has helped him become successful despite — by his own admission — having no experience in most of the businesses he became involved with.

"But that forced me to do creative things," said the Princeton graduate. "That makes you a good entrepreneur."

Rogers related many stories from his book, "Making Your Own Rules," and told how his love for learning has been so critical in his development as a businessman. He said the same principles apply to economic growth in any environment and lauded Utah for its commitment to provide educational opportunity for its residents.

"We have got to educate our labor force," he said. "That means our schools have to be better, our teachers have to be better ... and you've done a terrific job here in Utah."

He said nationally, the country has done a relatively poor job preparing the labor force to compete in the global marketplace.

"We're going to be a second world nation or a Third World nation (if things don't change)," Rogers told the audience. "Our children and grandchildren are not going to have the same standard of living unless we educate that workforce."

He noted that Utah's focus on technology has likely helped it in providing a higher quality education to its residents.

"That requires a better trained and educated person, which helps (the overall state economy)," he said.

Rogers also implored the audience of business leaders and entrepreneurs to be creative in their approach to growing their companies as well as encouraging civic leaders to remain fiscally responsible and maintain their focus on educating the future generations of Utah workers.

In the Beehive State, that formula may already be paying dividends, according to data from EDCU.

"In 2010-2011, we have been successful in creating and retaining over 8,000 jobs in Utah," said Jeff Edwards, EDCU president and chief executive officer. Many of those positions were in the growing information technology, composite engineering and outdoor products sectors, he explained.

Edwards said the state's strategy to increase its technology employment base has helped Utah avoid some of the significant economic issues other states are experiencing.

Rogers also said that while much of the country is facing challenging financial and economic times, the picture is not all "gloom and doom." There are signs of stability and potential improvement on the horizon, but only time will tell, he said.

"The economy is better off than the market is telling us," he said. "It's going to be a better year than (analysts are predicting)."

E-mail: jlee@desnews.com